

ORNITHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

MEXICAN BIRDS . . . FIRST IMPRESSIONS . . . BASED UPON AN ORNITHOLOGICAL EXPEDITION TO TAMAULIPAS, NUEVO LEON, AND COAHUILA . . . WITH AN APPENDIX BRIEFLY DESCRIBING ALL MEXICAN BIRDS. By George Miksch Sutton. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1951:7 × 10 in., xvi + 282 pp., with 16 color plates and 65 pen-and-ink drawings. \$10.00.

This attractively composed book is a record of Sutton's first field expedition to Mexico. The jacket-flap, with more than usual accuracy for jacket-flaps, states that "the first part is an informal account of the author's day-to-day experiences in the field, his intensely subjective thrill at finding a new species, and his cool, objective, and detailed descriptions of the birds he saw . . . Mr. Sutton has written *Mexican Birds* in the form of a personal narrative 'because students of Mexican birds will most likely go through much that I went through in adjusting myself to the fact that many birds there are the same as, or closely related to, those of the United States . . .'" The text is a diary-type account introducing the reader to several ecologic groupings of birds in northeastern Mexico. One of the high points is the experience with the Faisan Real (*Crax*), in which the reader gains insight into the bird *and* into the knowledgeable Mexican guides, the author, and the small drama of the hunt.

From the popular and explicit style of the text, I assume that the author addresses himself to readers with non-technical interest, and it therefore seems quite unnecessary to pepper the pages with scientific names. These are given again in the appendix anyway, along with vernacular names. The text would read more smoothly without the Latin names.

The author makes a considerable effort to suggest vernacular names for Middle American birds poorly named or as yet without such names. This he does in a constructive and sensible way. The topic is one always leaving room for difference of opinion, and recognizing this I would take exception to only one of his usages. Why should the familiar Carolina Wren, the species *Thryothorus ludovicianus*, be called Berlandier's Wren when one watches it in Nuevo León? This name is used by Hellmayr and, like so many others of his, should be ignored. Among other names used by Sutton, some very apt species vernaculars are suggested, and the reviewer believes ornithologists should try to use them.

The second part of this book, an appendix of 71 pages, is a summation of Mexican bird-life, with brief descriptions and clues to field identification, all especially useful now because no other guide is available. For the "tough" families, like the hummers, flycatchers, and finches, the appendix concisely reviews the fauna so that the student can meet the challenge of each family a little more optimistically. Although the title states that *all* "Mexican" birds are mentioned, at least the following are omitted: *Pipilo rutilus*, *Xenospiza baileyi*, *Aechmolophus mexicanus*, and *Amantrospiza relictus*. And of these, the first three are probably not so rare or so restricted in distribution as first thought to be. Sutton *does* list other poorly known species, such as *Neochloe brevipennis*. Certainly the omitted four ought to be included in the appendix if one bothers to mention, as Sutton does, *Vireo bairdi* from Cozumel Island or *Mimodes graysoni* from Socorro Island. Any traveller-ornithologist is less likely to go to some of these islands than to the heart of the mainland, where he stands a chance of meeting *Xenospiza* or *Aechmolophus*.

In the appendix, various problems of distribution and taxonomy are reflected from the

sources, such as Ridgway and Hellmayr, on which the author has relied, and he ventures opinions here and there which point up interesting problems. In the jays, I agree with his comments on *Psilorhinus*, but not with those on *Cissilopha*, in which the species *sambasiana* and *beecheii* occur together in Nayarit, a fact evidently not known to Sutton. To some extent Sutton has slighted, unintentionally I think, the southern part of Mexico, about whose geography his text is vague. He gives the impression that the term Mexican plateau applies to all highland Mexico west of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. At any rate, *Atlapetes pileatus* is said to be "restricted to the Mexican plateau" (page 57), whereas it occurs in the Sierra Madre del Sur, south of the Mexican plateau proper, in Oaxaca and Guerrero. Both the Scrub and Mexican jays are said to occur "throughout most of the plateau" (page 232), whereas the former also occurs farther south, in the Sierra Madre del Sur.

Like the small boy saving a bit of decorative cake frosting till last, I come to the illustrations. These are superb. The color plates are well reproduced and display the high level of Sutton's ability and versatility. The pen-and-ink sketches catch the spirit of the living bird remarkably well. They have an ease and simplicity of line that indicates Sutton's first-hand, competent acquaintance with birds as subjects. The confidence shown by his drawings is fully justified.—Frank A. Pitelka.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORNITHOLOGY. FROM ARISTOTLE TO THE PRESENT. (DIE ENTWICKLUNG DER ORNITHOLOGIE. VON ARISTOTELES ZUM GEGENWART.) By Erwin Stresemann. F. W. Peters, Berlin W15, 1951: xiv + 431 pp., 15 plates. 32 DM.

For many years Dr. Stresemann has contributed articles to journals in his own and other countries on the history of ornithology. Now he presents the fruits of his extensive studies in an impressive and scholarly volume.

The first section of the book deals with the period from the foundations of ornithology to the seventeenth century, the second and longest section with the development of systematics and the study of evolution, and the final section with the development of bird biology.

Aristotle raised bird study to the level of a science; for two thousand years he remained the chief authority. No significant new contribution was made until the thirteenth century when Frederick II of Hohenstaufen composed his remarkable "Art of Falconry," which, to the great loss of ornithology, remained unknown due to the hostility of the Church. Albertus Magnus, in the Middle Ages, and Gesner, in the Renaissance, transcribed the information of their predecessors from the Ancients down; both possessed the spirit of inquiry and omitted or questioned much that was fabulous.

At first biology and systematics traveled together; from the time of Aristotle ornithologists had tried to classify birds according to biological characters and thus they learned much about ecology and habits. This system, however, became increasingly unsatisfactory, especially because of the exotic species that were being discovered. In 1676, Willughby and Ray presented their system based, not on function, but on form, namely, structure of bill and feet and size of body. The history of many schemes of classification from that time to the present is traced in fourteen chapters with much attention given to explorations and amassing of collections, special chapters being devoted to Levaillant, Temminck, Bonaparte, and Finsch. The profound effect of Darwin's "Origin of Species" is described. There is an outline of the history of trinomial nomenclature as it was instituted by Schlegel, adopted by the American Ornithologists' Union in 1885